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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRASILIA 1566

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BR
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO ALLEGATIONS OF TORTURE OF FORMER FEDERAL DEPUTY

REF: BRASILIA 1077

1. JUSTICE MINISTRY FEB. 27 ISSUED STATEMENT WHICH BEGAN BY NOTING THAT RECENT PRESS REPORTS HAD SPOKEN OF FORMER FEDERAL DEPUTY MARCO ANTONIO TAVARES COELHO AS HAVING BEEN TORTURED WHILE IMPRISONED IN SAO PAULO. STATEMENT WENT ON TO MAKE FOLLOWING ASSERTIONS: (1) COELHO IS LONG-TIME ACTIVE MEMBER OF COMMUNIST PARTY, AND FORMER FEDERAL DEPUTY CASSATED (AND WITH POLITICAL RIGHTS SUSPENDED) IN 1964; (2) HE WAS CONDEMNED TO SEVEN YEARS' IMPRISONMENT IN 1966, REMAINING IN HIDING UNTIL HIS ARREST IN JANUARY IN CONNEC-TION WITH THE CLANDESTINE COMMUNIST PRINTING PRESS (BRASILIA 944), OF WHICH HE WAS THE PRINCIPAL DIRECTOR; (3) IN VIEW OF THE REPORTS OF HIS TORTURE, COMPETENT AUTHORITIES ORDERED HIM MEDICALLY EXAMINED BY MEDICAL-LEGAL INSTITUTE OF THE STATE OF SAO PAULO; (4) DOCTORS FOUND HIM FREE OF ANY SIGN OF TRAUMA; AND (5) IT IS THUS CONCLUDED THAT REPORTS OF TORTURE WERE MERELY "ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE INSIDIOUS CAM-PAIGN CARRIED OUT INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY
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AGAINST BRAZILIAN AUTHORITIES."

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2. ON SAME DAY, NATION-WIDE TELEVISION SHOWED FILM
OF COELHO IN PRISON COURTYARD, BOTH FULLY CLOTHED
AND WEARING ONLY SHORTS.

3. AS STATEMENT NOTES, BRAZILIAN PRESS HAD RECENTLY
GIVEN FULL COVERAGE TO EFFORTS ON COELHO'S BEHALF BY
HIS WIFE, INCLUDING CHARGES THAT HE HAD BEEN TORTURED.
AS REPORTED IN PRESS, HER LETTER TO PRESIDENT GEISEL
WAS DELIVERED TO GEISEL CONFIDANT AND CIVIL HOUSEHOLD
CHIEF GOLBERY BY CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES PRESIDENT CELIO
BORJA. LETTER, TEXT OF WHICH WAS CARRIED IN O ESTADO
DE SAO PAULO FEB. 28, CLAIMS THAT WHEN SHE SAW HIM HE
SHOWED SIGNS OF MISTREATMENT, INCLUDING SUBSTANTIAL
WEIGHT LOSS AND NUMEROUS MARKS, AND THAT HIS HANDS
WERE NUMB FROM ELECTRICAL SHOCK.

4. COMMENT: COELHO'S APPARENTLY GOOD CONDITION AT
PRESENT DOES NOT MEAN CONCLUSIVELY, OF COURSE, THAT HE HAD NOT
BEEN MISTREATED AND THEN RESTORED, BUT AT THE LEAST THE PUB-
LICITY SHOULD SERVE AS INSURANCE FOR HIS FUTURE HEALTH.
ALL IN ALL, THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE CASE,
IN THE WAKE OF JUSTICE MINISTER FALCAO'S STATEMENT
ON MISSING PERSONS (REFTEL), IS FURTHER EVIDENCE
OF THE ADOPTION AND EXECUTION OF A NEW POLICY
OF GREATER OPENESS AND RESPONSIVENESS ON SUCH
MATTERS. THE CASE WAS TREATD IN THE PRESS OPENLY
AND WITHOUT RESTRICTION FROM THE OUTSET. ALSO
NOTEWORTHY WAS THE PROMINENCE OF CIVILIANS AT THE
HIGHEST LEVELS (INCLUDING BORJA) IN THE MATTER; THIS IS
PRESUMABLY NOT ONLY INTENDED AS A SIGNAL THAT THE
CENTRAL (AND CIVILIAN) GOVERNMENT IS IN CHARGE, BUT ALSO
AS A MESSAGE TO SECURITY ELEMENTS
DOWN THE LINE THAT THEY MAY BE CALLED UPON AT ANY
TIME TO RENDER AN ACCOUNTING OF THEIR HANDLING
OF SUCH CASES. INDEED, DAO HAS LEARNED THAT
II ARMY (SAO PAULO) COMMANDER D'AVILA MELLO
(HIMSELF A MODERATE) WAS FURIOUS THAT HE WAS BY-
PASSED AND THEN BRACED BY BRASILIA: THE TRADITION
HAS BEEN TO RELY SOLELY ON THE LOCAL FOUR-STAR
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COMMANDER'S JUDGMENT. END COMMENT.
CRIMMINS

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NNN

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